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ABDUL MALIK MUJAHID

# The Biography of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal

(May Allah have mercy on him)

Salahuddin Ali Abdul Mawjood

Translated by

Sameh Strauch

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*In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent,  
the Most Merciful.*

## **Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal**

### **His Name and His Lineage:**

He is Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal bin Hilal bin Asad bin Idrees bin 'Abdillah bin Hayyan. His agnomen was Abu 'Abdillah.

'Abdullah bin 'Ata' said: "Ahmad bin Hanbal and the Prophet ﷺ have a common ancestor, Nizar, because the Prophet ﷺ was one of the descendants of Mudhar bin Nizar and all of Quraish are from Mudhar, while Ahmad bin Hanbal was descended from Rabee'ah bin Nizar, who was the brother of Mudhar bin Nizar. Nizar's sons were four in number: Mudhar bin Nizar, Rabee'ah bin Nizar, Iyad bin Nizar and Anmar bin Nizar, and from these four all of the Arab tribes are descended.<sup>[1]</sup>

Al-Asma'i said: "Abu 'Abdullah Ahmad bin Hanbal was from Zuhl and his father was a leader."<sup>[2]</sup>

Muhammad, the father of Abu 'Abdillah was one of the soldiers of Merv<sup>[3]</sup> and he died while still a young man, aged around thirty years. Ibn Al-Jawzi said: "His father was a professional soldier.

Imam Ahmad was originally from Basrah; his grandfather was Hanbal, who was one of the supporters of the 'Abbasid call and the Governor of

<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 20.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 31.

<sup>[3]</sup> Merv: A town in Turkmenistan.

Sarkhas and he was subjected to harm in the course of his calling to the family of Al-'Abbas.

Whether his father was a professional soldier, as some say, or whether he was a leader, as other say, he was a warrior, as all Arabs were at that time; they were not farmers, or craftsmen, but fierce warriors.

So both his father and his grandfather were brave fighters and from them Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – inherited his courage, his steadfastness in supporting the truth and his patient perseverance in the face of adversity and difficulty.

The mother of Abu 'Abdillah Ahmad bin Hanbal was from the Shaibani tribe; her name was Safiyyah bint Maimoonah bint 'Abdil Malik Ash-Shaibani, from the tribe of Banu 'Amir. His father stayed with them and married her. Her grandfather was 'Abdul Malik bin Sawadah bin Hind Ash-Shaibani, from Banu Shaiban; Arab tribes used to stay with him and he would provide hospitality to them. <sup>[1]</sup>

### **His Birth and His Upbringing:**

Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal was originally from Basrah, but his grandfather migrated to Khurasan and there he became the Governor of Sarkhas during the rule of the Umayyads. Then when the 'Abbasid call appeared on the horizon, he supported those who called to it and joined their ranks. His father was situated in Merv and there his mother conceived him; then she went, while carrying him to Baghdad, where she gave birth to him. He was born – may Allah have mercy on him – in the

<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 31.

month of Rabee' Al-Awwal, in the year 164 A. H. and there is no dispute regarding his date of birth, since he himself informed us of it. His son, 'Abdullah said: "I heard my father saying: "I was born in the month of Rabee' Al-Awwal, in the year 164."

His other son, Salih said: "He (i.e. his father) was born in the year 164, in the month of Rabee' Al-Awwal and he was carried (in his mother's womb) from Merv."<sup>[1]</sup>

His father died while he was still a young man and Ahmad a small boy, after which he was taken care of by his mother. He spoke of this on one occasion, saying: "I was brought from Khurasan while still a babe in the womb and she gave birth to me here, so I never saw my grandfather or my father."

As we mentioned earlier, his father died while still a young man aged thirty years and his mother took care of him. His son, Salih reported from his father: "She (i.e. his mother) pierced my ears and placed in them two pearls and these she later presented to me and I sold them for thirty dirhams." It is possible that his mother learnt this custom of ear-piercing from Khurasan, because it was not a well-known custom in the lands of the Arabs. Imam Ahmad began to reveal his outstanding qualities from a young age, becoming a scribe from a young age; he said: "I became a scribe when I was a small boy, then I obtained a position in the *Deewan* when I was fourteen years old."

He was known, even as a young boy, for his extreme

<sup>[1]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 12.



politeness and good manners, his high moral character, his fine writing and his refusal to pen anything objectionable. Abu 'Afeef said of him: "He was one of the scribes with us when he was a young boy and we acknowledged his virtue. The Caliph was at Ar-Riqqah and the people<sup>[1]</sup> would write letters to their homes; and they would send their women to the master with messages, saying: "Send Ahmad bin Hanbal to us," so that he could write the replies to their letters, and he would come to them with his head lowered and write the replies to their letters. Sometimes, they might dictate something improper or objectionable to him, but he would not write it for them."<sup>[2]</sup>

Abu Siraj bin Khuzaimah was impressed by his politeness and good conduct and he said one day: "I support my children financially and I provide teachers for them, so that they may be educated and well-mannered, but I do not see them becoming so. Yet this boy, Ahmad bin Hanbal, who is an orphan, see how he has turned out!" And he was amazed.<sup>[3]</sup>

The boy Ahmad stood out among his contemporaries, due to his piety, the meticulous attention which he paid to his work, his patience and earnestness and his perseverance in the face of those things which he disliked. He was not a boy who spent his childhood in frivolous pursuits; rather he was a complete man, in spite of his tender years. It is likely that was due to the

<sup>[1]</sup> That is, the people with him, such as the soldiers, the governors and others would write letters to their families.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 22.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Manaqib Al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 23.

fact that he was forced to depend on himself so much when he was a child and the independent nature that he had had since his earliest years. These attributes attracted the attention of the scholars with whom he came in contact during this period, to such an extent that Al-Haitham bin Jameel said of him: "If this young boy lives, he will be cited as an evidence as the people of his time."<sup>[1]</sup>

It is clear that this prediction was fulfilled, for this young boy became a man and lived to the age of seventy-seven years and he was a guiding light to the people of his time, due to his knowledge, his moral character, his piety, his patient perseverance, his great tolerance and his disdain for the harms (which he suffered) for the sake of his beliefs.<sup>[2]</sup>

### His Description:

Imam Ahmad – may Allah have mercy on him – was a tall man, with a good-looking face and a brown complexion; he was kindhearted and extremely humble. Reports of his actual height varied; some said that he was tall, while others said that he was of medium height. Possibly the reason for these contradictory reports was due to the different ideas of what constitutes "tall" among the people.

Abu Ja'far bin Zareeh Al-'Ukbari said: "I sought out Ahmad bin Hanbal to ask him about a certain matter

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tareekh Al-Islam* by Az-Zahabi, in the biography of Imam Ahmad.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Ibn Hanbal – His Life and Times, His Opinions and His Jurisprudence* by Az-Zahabi, by Imam Muhammad Abu Zahr, p. 20.